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## **Join Together with the Band: Authenticating Collective Creativity in Bands and the Myth of Rock Authenticity Reappraised**

**Adam Behr**

### **Abstract**

*This article considers how the group identity of rock bands relates to discourses of authenticity. Exposés of the Romantic rock ideology, while broadly convincing, have overlooked the extent to which it incorporated the collective creativity of bands. Building on Moore's reorientation towards processes of authentication, rather than "authenticity" as a quality in itself, I assess the band as the site of intimate conjunctions between creativity and sociability, a method against which audiences make authenticating judgments. I suggest that deliberations surrounding genre and authenticity have overemphasized aesthetic and industrial processes and highlight the social practices underpinning them.*

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The changes in popular music during the mid-20th century, and the 1960s in particular, fed into genre ideologies as rock and roll burst its banks and mutated into rock. A shift in the perceived relationship between commerce and art in the "rock era" bled into the ways in which the music was organized both in terms of production (among musicians) and consumption (in relation to audiences and critics). As the peer-driven movements of the 1950s matured, a significant portion of the next wave of popular musicians – many emerging from art schools and the blues boom – arranged and presented themselves under group identities. Their business, social, and creative activities were aligned into packages from formative musical experiences through to magazine covers and the top of the charts. The complete history of the rock band's evolution as a *modus operandi* is a larger matter, but it is worth mentioning here that it was imbricated in the acquisition of ideological baggage when rock took on the mantle of the "people's music" (MacDonald 192–209) as those making the music increasingly resembled the youth market at which it was aimed. Songwriting, performance, rebellion, and teen-idol appeal could now be wrapped into one package as the alumni of the rock-and-roll boom hitched their careers to their peers. Folded into these changes was the concept of "authenticity," much picked over in the study of popular music but underexamined in relation to the band as an object. My aim here is to undertake a more detailed examination of how this slippery concept applies to the phenomenon of the band and assess some possible ramifications of this.

"Authenticity" is a term that has been frequently misused, or at least used lazily.

Consequently it has also been much derided and its value questioned. The means by which the popular music process continually seeks to valorize, commercialize, and incorporate symbols of difference, novelty, and even opposition appears at odds with the instinctive assumptions of many of those who value them.

The notion that something is “authentic” suggests that it has the qualities, to follow the OED definition, of being “reliable” or “trustworthy.” The separation of these qualities, as they apply to creative endeavors, from the mechanisms of commerce pre-dates modern popular music, although the consequences of this separation are equally apparent in modern contexts. Lee Marshall traces its rhetorical background at least as far as the Romantic movement of the 19th century.

Out of social changes such as industrialisation and urbanisation, there developed a number of ideas concerning art and creativity. The most significant of these were: the individualisation of creativity; (tortured) genius; originality; the radical separation of art and market... All of these features are important rhetorically because they provide the dominant image of the artist in modern society. (Marshall 2)

Certainly, Romantically tinged conceptions of authenticity have infused discussions of popular music in general, and the rock era in particular. It is a common trope in rock criticism, for instance: “The Ramones are authentic primitives whose work has to be heard to be understood” (Paul Nelson, 1976); “One hopes Arrested Development is savvy enough to stick with its substantial, authentic groove” (A. Foege, 1992); “Jefferson Airplane was a band of absolute artists – Jefferson Starship, at its best, became nothing but a band of hitmakers [and] chose survival by means of sheer commercialism” (Paul Evans, 1992) (all quoted in McLeod 103–05). Critical assessments abound which take for granted that inchoate values of truth and honesty depend upon an opposition between art and commerce. In the process of “Deconstructing a (Useful) Romantic Illusion,” Deena Weinstein illustrates some of the reasons for this.

The art-commerce binary functions for rock journalists in several ways. Merely perpetuating the myth makes their writing agreeable to their readers... And clearly the rock industry approves of their ideology and supports much of it with advertisements... Maintaining the myth of the opposition of art and commerce, and seemingly siding with the artist, allows rock journalists to maintain the aura of art critics, rather than appearing to be members of the hype machine. (Weinstein 66–67)

Even when writers are engaged in more forensic examinations, or in exposing the hype, there remains an underlying sense that business and creativity are naturally conflicting forces. Fred Goodman’s *Mansion on the Hill*, for example, covers the corporatization of the counterculture but its sub-title, “The Head-On Collision of Rock and Commerce,” nevertheless implies that the two are

fundamentally opposed.

Given popular music's role as a marker of identity (Bennett 195), it is perhaps unsurprising that people should hope that their tastes are validated by something beyond mere entertainment, and motivated by goals beyond profit. Besides Romantic ideals allowing fans to validate their own "sense of autonomy" (Weinstein 67) appeals to a moral plane are built into judgments of popular music. Simon Frith's examination of the aesthetics of popular music includes the observation that aesthetic choices and moral values, like honesty, are conjoined.

The marking off of some tracks and genres and artists as "good" and others as "bad" seems to be a necessary part of popular music pleasure and use; it is a way in which we establish our place in various music worlds and use music as a source of identity. And "good" and "bad" are key words because they suggest that aesthetic and ethical judgments are tied together: not to like a record is not just a matter of taste; it is also a matter of morality. (Frith, *Performing Rites* 72)

The concept of authenticity, then, has become central to the ways in which we think about, and apply value to, popular music and is inveigled into the surrounding sales processes, critical discourses, and instinctive audience responses which I discuss in the next section.

### **Discourses and Assumptions**

These discourses, and associated value judgments, became particularly pronounced from the 1960s when they brought an ideological dimension to genre distinctions in popular music. The association of some forms of music, like folk, with an anti-commercial stance, of course, pre-dated the rock era. Folk songs with "no got-up glitter" (Hubert Parry, quoted in Moore, "Authenticity" 211) were presented in opposition to the commercial music of the early 20th century. Even here, however, there were disputes. The presence of mediating forces – and political agendas – in the creation of canons and genre narratives suggests a need for the contextualization of how these values came to be ascribed (Brocken 89 –93). This is compounded by the fact that artists and others have appealed to rock's antecedents, its musicological lineage, to validate an essentialist conception of it as unmediated. As Moore points out, the blues serves as both a "pretext" and a "context" for rock authenticity (Rock 64-73). But the commercial presentation of popular music as anti-commercial grew wings with the onset of the rock era and the inclusion of serious artistic merit – beyond entertainment – within the remit of the star. Keith Negus describes a key change in emphasis:

Whereas the music of the rock n' roll era had been associated with working class teenagers, during the 1960s various elements of pop were "appropriated" by a recently enfranchised grammar school student and "hip" middle class audience. Rock was not only a source of pleasure for these consumers, but it was imbued with libertarian and artistic allusions

as the emergent middle class audience (and artists) drew on an aesthetic vocabulary inherited from an appreciation of European high culture. (Negus 57)

This is important, because, for all the oppositional energy attached to rock and roll, there was no claim to high art to distinguish it from other youth music. The presentation of the emergent “rock” as non-commercial relied on some debatable claims and a consistent factor has been the differentiation between itself and other, apparently compromised, forms. Among these claims are those portraying “rock” as unmediated in comparison to “pop.” This relies on the questionable idea that some forms of technological mediation are inherently less authentic than others. Jason Toynbee offers an example:

[There is] a strong naturalistic discourse where, for instance, Humbucker pickups and Marshall valve amplifiers are treated as though they were timeless craftsman’s tools, while the use of sampling or sequencing technologies is considered to be a form of trickery. (Toynbee 59)

Even among more aesthetically open-minded practitioners and listeners, there is a lingering adherence to the idea that valuable creativity hinges on an anti-commercial position. Keightley distinguishes between a “Romantic authenticity” and a “Modernist authenticity” (137). The former category privileges tradition, continuity, community, a core sound, gradual stylistic change, directness, and hiding musical technology. Modernists privilege the status of the artist and are more inclined towards radical shifts, openness regarding sounds, obliqueness, and the celebration of technology. Their perception of rock authenticity derives from the introduction of high-art values into the mainstream. Nevertheless both camps cleave to a higher ideal of authentic music making. “Both Romantics and Modernists,” says Keightley, “are anxious to avoid corruption through involvement with commerce and oppose the alienation they see as rooted in industrial capitalism” (136).

Rock, then, in either expressive or experimental mode, was positioned as distinct from a commercial mainstream. As has been already noted, a considerable financial and critical compact arose out of this, with “authenticity” at its heart, and which, in rock’s placing itself against commercially compromised “pop,” involved processes of exclusion, even as it claimed to be of “the people.” A good deal of academic attention has been paid to decoding this compact. The facts of rock’s evolution work against how it has been presented and consumed as innately authentic and scholars have not been hesitant to point this out. For example,

The myth of authenticity is... one of rock’s own ideological effects, an aspect of its sales process: rock stars can be marketed as artists, and their particular sounds marketed as a means of identity. (Frith, “Towards an Aesthetic” 137).

Less believable than it ever was, the art-versus-commerce myth is

promoted and probably believed in as much if not more than it ever has been. The myth persists because too many people gain too many different things – money, identity, prestige, or a common critical standard – from it to give it up. (Weinstein 68)

While rock ideology has deployed terms like “honesty” and “authenticity” in contrast to “commercialism,” academic critiques like these are replete with sceptical inflections. Negus also notes the “Ironies of Authenticity” (69–71); Toynebee’s tone (above) is similarly sceptical, and Keightley’s measured (re)consideration of rock undercuts grand claims by exposing their context and a wider narrative.<sup>1</sup>

The individual gestures of “making music seriously” may vary, the particular formulations of authenticity may differ; conflicts between them may drive rock forward... Nonetheless, the key structuring principles of rock remained relatively stable in the last three decades of the twentieth century, even as its cultural prominence declined. (Keightley 139)

Due to its presentation as an absolute in the service of selling music, and its status as a dividing line across which different musics are evaluated, rock authenticity – as the assessments above indicate – has been viewed as something of a dogma whose inconsistencies should be exposed, or at least explained. The conceptual model of innate authenticity is itself problematic. In any case, the borders between “rock” and “pop” (or indeed between any genres) are open to question and dependent on both their context and the listener’s position. This means that the ground beneath appeals to a direct authenticity becomes unstable. Johan Fornäs notes that attempts to displace the exclusionary ideology of rock authenticity are doomed to recreate its essentialism if they only replace the referents for the “authentic.”

Since the 1960s a network of institutionalised voices... have asserted and administered the sincerity, legitimacy, and hegemony of rock in opposition to the vulgarity of pop. Some critics of this rock establishment have on the other hand turned the same dichotomy upside-down while allegedly dismissing it, as they deride the authenticity illusions of the rock establishment and elevate the honest construction of the pop machinery. (Fornäs, “Future” 395)

There is a disconnect, then, between our apparent emotional need to validate aesthetic preferences against a concept of authenticity and our intellectual wish to make that concept a stable point of reference. With one foot on the solid ground of terminological definition and contextual analysis and the other on the floating boat of genre definitions and contested ideologies, the concept of authenticity becomes spatchcocked, torn between opposing tendencies that recognize it as relative but acknowledge its use as an absolute.

Attempts to resolve this have had to take account of multiple factors – the

unstable generic dividing lines in popular music, the historical variety of subject positions, the social variety of subject positions. In short, “authenticity” is being made to do too much work for a single indivisible concept. It is unsurprising then that such attempts have had recourse to sub-dividing a monolithic concept into more manageable and defensible systems. These have differed in their angle of approach, but have in common an attempt to account for the variety of contexts in which authenticity is used, and the variety of cultural and social objects to which it is applied. It is to an overview of these models of authenticity, attempts at subdivision, that I now turn.

### **Models of Authenticity**

Lawrence Grossberg divides authenticity along three broad generic threads. “Rock/ folk” authenticity involves the articulation of individual and inward needs in the context of a communally mediated system. Authenticity in dance music, alternatively, involves the “construction of a rhythmic and sexual body” (202). Finally, an accommodation of postmodern play with different styles provides a version of authenticity that resides in the self-awareness of the overtly avant-garde. Here, the acknowledgement of artificial construction in pop becomes a source of honesty since it highlights the realities of the matter. This goes some way towards unshackling authenticity from generic and aesthetic mores, but still locates it across genre lines even as claims to primacy of any particular genre are deflated.

Fornäs attempts to address this, adapting the model by repositioning its labels within a system whose terms refer back to a sociocultural map rather than a generic one. Rock authenticity becomes “social authenticity,” since it relies upon the processes of, “collective group interaction... [where] the judgement of genuineness is based on the norms that are legitimate within a certain (real or imagined) social (interpretive) community.” Dance and the body are relocated into a category of “subjective authenticity... focuse[d] on the individual’s mind and body, as a state of presence,” while postmodernism and the authenticity of self-conscious artistry are explained according to the wider symbolic milieu in which they operate and to which they refer (Fornäs, *Cultural Theory* 276).

The third form could be defined as *cultural or meta-authenticity*, since it moves within (and derives legitimacy from) the level of the symbolic expressions (texts) themselves: the well-formedness of cultural works related to historically determined aesthetic genre rules. (Fornäs, “*Cultural Theory*” 276, emphasis in original)

Allan Moore also adopts a tri-partite model and, in building upon prior systems, is sensitive to tensions in mythical formulations of authenticity. He takes account of the problems caused by our need to ascribe authenticity alongside our failure to adequately pin down a definition of it.

What we declare “myth” is that whose historical reality we cannot prove,

indeed, we have every reason to doubt: in rock terms, this is the myth of unmediated expression. But, equally, what we declare “myth” is that whose psychological necessity is so strong for us that we are constrained to build it. (Moore, “U2” 27)

Consequently his tri-partite division, while not necessarily contradicting that of Fornäs, shifts the spotlight sideways, away from the nexus of individual and cultural formations contained in the music. Moving instead towards an assessment of “who, rather than what, is being authenticated” (Moore, “Authenticity” 209) he examines accounts of authenticity that privilege honesty in different ways and with different referents – experience, tradition, and ideology. In so doing he notes, acknowledging a historicized position, that they have in common a particular relationship between audience and performer.

What unites all these understandings of authenticity is their vector, the physical direction in which they lead... Particular acts and sonic gestures (of various kinds) made by particular artists are interpreted by an engaged audience as investing authenticity in those acts and gestures – the audience becomes engaged not with the acts and gestures themselves, but directly with the originator of those acts and gestures. (Moore, “Authenticity” 214)

Thus, where Fornäs’s model accounts for the variety of musical styles in play, Moore’s engages with the locus of this authentication, and the way in which the audience goes about it. Drawing on rock’s claims to uncompromised communication, Moore posits, “*authenticity of expression* or... ‘first person authenticity’ [which] arises when an originator (composer, performer) succeeds in conveying the impression that his/her utterance is one of integrity, that it represents an attempt to communicate in an unmediated form with an audience.” (“Authenticity” 214, emphasis in original).

Such claims, although emotionally powerful, are subject to doubts regarding the plausibility of “unmediated” expression. Moore therefore correlates them with the ways in which artists refer back to previous markers (the blues, say, or even other acts) as legitimating strategies. Here authenticity is conferred if artists manage to impart to audiences a sense that their music is true to an (often auratic) original: “*authenticity of execution*, or... ‘third person authenticity’... arises when a performer succeeds in conveying the impression of accurately representing the ideas of another, embedded within a tradition of performance” (“Authenticity” 218, emphasis in original).

Finally, he considers the ways in which an audience’s own experiences of life are read into performances, feeding into the psychological tendency to build stabilizing myths. Here the affirmative power of music is recognized: “[T]his ‘place of belonging’...a ‘centredness’...implies an active lifting of oneself from an unstable experiential ground and depositing oneself within an experience to be trusted, an experience which centres the listener” (Moore, “Authenticity” 219).



Hence, the last component of his typology is, “‘second person’ authenticity, or *authenticity of experience*, which occurs when a performance succeeds in conveying the impression to a listener that that listener’s experience of life is being validated, that the music is ‘telling it like it is’ for them” (“Authenticity” 220, emphasis in original).

By formulating a code that takes account of audience members as evaluators, Moore moves further away from a view of authenticity as inherent in genres, or even individual texts. Simultaneously, he acknowledges that these authentications depend upon the success of the performer in conveying these (often overlapping) characteristics, thereby sidestepping a relativistic minefield in which either nothing is authentic, or everything is.

This allows for a more plausible, if also extended, understanding of authenticity and authentication as general concepts within social contexts. But applying them to specific instances can generate stresses in the overarching models, particularly when such instances fit uneasily into normative or homogenizing categories. Carys Wyn Jones, for example, describes Radiohead as “occupying the oxymoronic position of possessing mainstream integrity” (38), a phrase which usefully highlights the paradox implied in trying to ascribe authenticity in commercial forms like rock. The slippery nature of the concept presents analysts with something of a differential equation whose terms shift according to which subject is in the spotlight. As she notes, neither a worm’s-eye nor a bird’s-eye view alone is adequate.

An obvious answer would be to reject meta-narratives of authenticity and to simply leave intact small, situational instances of perceived integrity, sincerity, and truth. And yet this too is misleading as all judgements happen interrelationally, and an overall coherent picture is always built up around a single referent that accommodates all facets of its articulation in our known world-view. To deny this mini meta-narrative is as misleading as it is to say that authenticity is a fixed term unchanged by culture or the passage of time. (Jones 47)

Here the problem becomes how to negotiate the numerous different ways in which authentication takes place. Moore’s model usefully accounts for the “centred” experience without buying into the concomitant myths that obfuscate our attempts to understand it. But models that become, as Jones suggests, “progressively non-specific in order to encompass all styles of music” fall prey to the quirks of the particular instances she describes (49). Radiohead’s problematic status here derives not from the fact that such models cannot encompass their songs or performances. (It is easy enough to see how these can be authenticated in terms of centered experiences, sincere expressions, or contributions to a cultural conversation). Rather, it exposes potholes in the terrain that Fornäs and Moore seek to map. A presentation of naivety and uninformed sincerity, for instance, might be unsustainable over a long career. Jones asks how Radiohead manage to convey the sincere angst of “Creep” and the artistic

distance of Kid A, and deploy both within a mainstream commercial setting. These questions are not incompatible with over-arching typologies, but neither are they comprehensively accounted for by them.

Both the problem and the value of the concept of authenticity in popular music is that the word generates a multitude of implications and sites of authentication. It is the tension that such models...generate when mapped on to actual songs that is often most revealing, and so such models are more useful if they undergo constant evolution rather than be declared suddenly extinct. (Jones 50)

Moore's map helps us through this web but the path remains strewn with obstacles thrown up by complex musical transitions and formations. Therefore, it is to its evolution that I turn next. In trying to account more fully for the enduring draw of rock's myths, I aim to refine his concept by incorporating into it the historical baton passing of "authenticity" that occurred in the 1960s when the birth of the rock era saw the folk movement's reaction against the mainstream redeployed within it (Kieghtley 127) and when rock reached for the territory of "high art." To do this, I will pay particular attention to the rock band, that form of collective creativity central to many of the narratives and myths that arose around rock, and illustrative of ascriptions of authenticity that pertain to the social context, and history, of the music and its reception.

### **"Collective"/"First Person Plural" Authenticity in Theory**

Rock's incorporation of an anti-commerce rhetoric – and attempt to enter the realm of "art" – were part and parcel of the move towards the center of popular music production of the band model predicated on the group identity.<sup>2</sup> Many of the problems associated with the concept of authenticity, and tensions between genres, arose during this period. The hostile reaction to Dylan's embrace of elements of the rock aesthetic is perhaps the most emblematic of these. But, as well as hiding his eyes behind dark glasses, Dylan also (partially) hid himself in a band. This was not the fully-fledged group identity evidenced by the "four headed monster" of the Beatles (Beatles 354). But it was a retreat from the lone troubadour of "folk" Bob Dylan. And the musicians he chose to expedite this shift themselves stepped out of his shadow later in the 1960s, enacting an archetype of group identity as the Band.

These tensions are at the root of Jones's conception of "oxymoronic mainstream integrity." But we can begin to unpick the knot by understanding how group identity has come to underwrite certain perceptions of authenticity in rock, as illustrated by acts like Radiohead.

The internal contradictions become less problematic if we allow (following Moore) for a "first person plural" or "collective" authenticity.<sup>3</sup> This does not contradict Moore's assertion that it is the audience doing the authenticating, nor do I propose to replace any of his categories. Rather, a "collective authenticity" allows

for an authentication to take place that accounts not only for performers' or songwriters' expressions but also for the social context in which they are produced. Creativity in bands is socially constructed. If it can be acknowledged that one of the consequences of this is that the mode of social construction is in itself both a site of authentication and a reason for it, the position held by acts like Radiohead seems less contradictory.

Nor do we need to fall back into the commercial/authentic opposition. The "first person plural" cuts across aesthetic genre lines and could as easily be applied to less straightforwardly "credible" acts across the rock/pop spectrum, like ABBA for example. The "mainstream integrity," in this case, is not a Romantic victory over commerce, or a commercially successful exception to an incorporative rule. It is the means by which audiences recognize, and musicians enact, the communal creativity that underlies both the commercial marketing of "authenticity" and the pre-commercial group basis for it – the social aspect of the band. And even if this is only "pre-commercial" insofar as a relationship with commerce at some stage is implicit, even perhaps built into the model (and certainly more or less inevitable in pragmatic terms), the authentication that takes place refers to a sense of the "we" that makes this engagement in the first place. The "mainstream" part of the formulation is the commercially extended version – the brand – referring back to the social component, the band's group identity. This then connotes "integrity," the original peer activity at the heart of the brand.

The "we" of the "first person plural" therefore underwrites "first person singular" expressions not by conferring upon them a Romantic validity but by affirming the social nature of the creativity in hand. This is not just the group underpinning the expressions of the singer, although that is a factor. Even with the band as a singular entity, the "we" of this mode of creativity underpins the collective "I" who makes the expression. With this conception of how an idealized conception of collective identity fits into theoretical ascriptions of authenticity in mind, I now move on to a discussion of how these work in practice for bands.

### **"Collective"/"First Person Plural" Authenticity in Practice**

It is easy enough to see a band as a kind of text through the prism of branding. Logos, images, and bodies of work can be lumped together and read off as coherent sites of analysis. But the band also exists as a socially extended phenomenon and as the focus of authentication. The status of "collectivity" (the band mode) as an object of authentication in itself could also shed some light on everyday debates surrounding line-ups. Part of what is at stake is the authenticity of a particular configuration of musicians. Whether any of the different incarnations of Pink Floyd,<sup>4</sup> say, or all of them counts as "the real deal" is a matter of how audience members ascribe the "first person plural" authenticity, in the same way as they judge a rock song according to its success in conveying an emotion, a folk performance as true to the form or a pop act as articulating their own experience.

It seems plausible, too, that these ascriptions also derive from audience members' validation of their own experiences and judgments. Fans of long-running acts that have lost iconic members – Keith Moon from the Who, for instance, or Bon Scott from AC/DC – invoke a kind of cultural capital in having seen the band in its supposed prime, a complement of original – or “classic” – members conferring a kind of authenticity lacking in later versions. Battered tour t-shirts from bygone decades become markers of a journey through life with the band. Acts themselves are aware of this, anniversary tours often making much of guest spots from former members, as with the appearance of Mick Taylor and Bill Wyman on the Stones' 50th anniversary jaunt or Status Quo's reformation of a classic line-up for their own 50th anniversary tour. Likewise, partial reunions confer an added frisson to solo shows, as with David Gilmour's 2013 guest appearances at Roger Waters gigs.

In such group-identified bands, personnel perform more than just musical functions. They are intrinsic to the “character” of the band (its collective agency), which serves as the starting point for the brand. Replacing personnel becomes more than merely a case of finding technically suitable musicians. If newcomers are to become part of the core band – as opposed to just touring side musicians—there must be a fit with the supposed ethos of the group – the social aspect as well as the creative one. Replacements may have a prior connection with the band – from a scene or peer group (as with Ron Wood in the Rolling Stones or David Gilmour in Pink Floyd). In other cases, a family member will stand in (as with Jason Bonham in Led Zeppelin). It is notable, too, that many groups choose not to list incoming musicians as full members. The Who, for instance, features Daltrey and Townshend as original members with even longstanding side-men denied full membership status. Likewise, the latter incarnation of Pink Floyd centralized members of the classic line-up as “principles” and Rolling Stones shows prioritize the core of Jagger, Richards, Watts, and Wood in curtain calls and publicity.

Introducing a new member to the core is trickier, and can lead to the kind of debates alluded to above about an “authentic” line-up. The intra-group politics surrounding expulsion and replacement revolve around more than musical compatibility. The group-identified band is a compact of musical, social, and business relationships and pressures in any of these areas are disruptive. “Musical differences,” widely taken as cover for personal animosity, in fact often involve a mixture of these categories. In the tight conjunction of personal proximity, business partnership, and creative practice in bands – where decisions affect the careers of all members – it is often hard to disentangle musical and personal arguments. Internal power struggles may feed off personality clashes and divergent views on the best course forward in career terms. A drug-exacerbated lack of effectiveness, for instance, (as with Brian Jones) may be both symptomatic and causal of a disintegrating social dynamic. Integrating new members entails trying to ensure that fans feel the core identity remains extant. Thus incomers, like Ron Wood, are sometimes accorded public-facing membership status long before financial parity. The feasibility of this varies.

Freddie Mercury was so intrinsic to the Queen brand that subsequent collaborations have separated the singer from the band name (which refers back to original members only) in the branding. Others, like AC/DC – where the brand identity was less centered on the singer – found it easier to replace a core member.

Each case differs, but my general point is that line-up changes in long-standing bands – those that have undergone the full extent of the branding process –echo the paradoxical ship of Theseus.<sup>5</sup> To re-work this into a more modern context, we could see it as a drum kit. Skins can be replaced, or a snare. Over time, each component might be new. At what point does it cease to become the same drum kit? The debates about whether Bon Scott's AC/DC or the Rolling Stones after Brian Jones are the "correct" or genuine article are, to an extent, moot. Original line-ups do not necessarily trump "classic" line-ups or vice versa.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, it is plausible that the apparently diluted Rolling Stones of the 2000s actually put in better performances than some in previous eras which saw heroin-addled guitarists nodding off on stage (Bockris 248).

Just as arguments about whether a performance is "genuine" in the Romantic sense can turn in circles until reviewed in the context of the authentication process, so debates surrounding personnel can be better understood if reconfigured to take in the "first person plural" authentications that audiences make regarding not only their own experiences of bands (and brands) but also the ways in which these feed into wider perceptions of what is "authentic."

This is often missing from critical accounts of the branded experience of long-running bands. John Strausbaugh, for instance, offers a sustained and entertaining polemic against the culture of nostalgia surrounding the septugenarian survivors of the rock era, with the Rolling Stones as a keystone of his argument. His lament is for the sense of revolution with which their performances were once imbued (even if these were, all along, partly an act, as Jagger's knighthood and business acumen suggest). For Strausbaugh, rock is a young person's game and the bulk of his complaint is not that the Stones and their ilk are still playing, but that they're behaving on stage like men in their twenties.

[W]hen the elder Mick sits on a stool and simply sings a nice, bluesy number, it's much easier on the eye and the ear than his sexy-senior-citizen antics... If they'd played the whole concert that way...it would have been a lovely evening out with the elderly Rolling Stones. But, of course, you can't play an evening of acoustic blues to a stadium crowd of yahoos who've paid way too much money and drunk way too many beers not to hear "Satisfaction" and see some fireworks. (Strausbaugh 68–69)

This disillusionment is understandable, but also rooted in a form of the nostalgia he decries. His dogged insistence that the baby boomers, having dropped the revolutionary ball, are now engaged in a self-delusional pantomime hinges on the

assumption that his “first person plural” ascriptions of authenticity have priority over the “yahoos” in terms of a (moral) claim to valid experience. Subjecting such stadium gigs to the weight of his moral expectations, he overlooks the component of entertainment and enjoyment that, anyway, drove the rock era as much as the ideology that accompanied it. In doing so he trips backwards into an essentialist position. Subsequent generations of Rolling Stones audiences are aware that this is not rebelliousness in anything more than a theatrical sense. But some of them are judging the latter-day Stones as true enough to the original “drum kit” to perform its function for them as a performance.

The residue of the “first person plural” of the band is what drives the continuing success of the brand, a lot of which is the straightforward marketing of nostalgia. But this is not the whole picture. Audiences judge for themselves whether a branded act has enough integrity to the “we” that lies beneath the brand to validate their experience of it. Musicians make decisions balancing their own views of how worthwhile co-operation with continuing or former bandmates might be regarding their individual agendas. Some of these may be financial. Others may not. A band’s perception of what is a worthwhile experience need not correlate with those of audiences either, as long as certain minimum performative lip service is paid to the collective. The audience may have ascribed sufficient “first person plural” authenticity to validate their experience of it, even if it was characterized for the band by a big pay cheque that scarcely justified an undercurrent of seething resentment. Pink Floyd clearly felt that either the ethos or scale of Live 8 merited subordinating personal reservations to the task of reproducing the classic line-up. (The 2007 tribute concert to Syd Barrett, with former members performing separately, obviously was not cause for similar priority over personal concerns.) Likewise, the relative commercial failure of Mick Jagger’s solo ventures (Bockris 388) is an example of how sections of the audience can reject an act as insufficiently authentic to the residue of the “first person plural.”

There might well be a pantomime element to the type of performance that induces such discomfort in Strausbaugh, but it is maybe not as self-delusional as he thinks. The Rolling Stones, in this case, are playing at being (a version of) themselves. Audiences are complicit in this aspect of the pantomime and can accommodate it, to varying degrees, depending on how far the performance is successful in enacting a sense of the social identity at the core of the brand. Strausbaugh quotes Giorgio Gomelsky, a blues promoter and early manager figure of the Rolling Stones, reminiscing about an early gig.

So Brian [Jones] says, “Giorgio, there’th sikhth of us, and there’th three of them. Do you think it’th worthwhile? Thould we play?” I said, “Brian, how many people do you think can fit in here? A hundred? Okay, well then play as if there were a hundred people in here.” And they did. And that was one of the reasons I rarely went to see the Stones in later times, because in some ways, that was like the best show they ever did. For three people. (Gomelsky, quoted in Strausbaugh 41–42)

A putative spectrum of credibility here for long-standing acts can easily spiral into absurdity, whereby the poorly attended early performance is the most authentic. Playing to three men in a pub becomes more authentic than the Stones in 1972, which is more authentic than the 1990 Steel Wheels tour, itself more authentic than subsequent anniversary outings.

It is also likely that, notwithstanding audience bragging rights, few bands regard a performance in front of three people as a career highlight. (Drummer Graham Whiteside referred to this process of building a live audience as “the rainy Cumbernauld on a Tuesday thing” – interview with the author.) Regardless of the intrinsic quality of the performance, such events tend to attain cultural capital retrospectively with regard to extrinsic factors brought about by subsequent success. In practical terms, persistent failure to move beyond playing to tiny audiences is also likely to lead to dissolution.<sup>7</sup>

I am not proposing an encompassing relativism here, or implying that some performances, or line-ups, cannot be better than others. I am, however, suggesting that we can circumnavigate this one-upmanship, which derives from the conflation of different perceptions of authenticity. In summary, a concept of “first person plural” – or “collective” – authenticity allows us to apply Moore’s system to the text of the band such that we can understand its appeal and function as a model without the burdens of generically infused value judgments. It is to the implications for those value judgments that I now turn. What do these acts of authentication regarding bands, and their line-ups, say about the purportedly ephemeral nature of rock authenticity within popular music more widely?

### **“Collective”/“First Person Plural” Authenticity in Context**

For Frith, “Rock was a last romantic attempt to preserve ways of music making – performer as artist, performance as ‘community’ – that had been made obsolete by technology and capital” (*Music for Pleasure* 1).

That this attempt failed is a critical commonplace, and at the heart of jeremiads like Strausbaugh’s. What survived, however, was the form of the band as a key producer of meaning in popular music. This *modus operandi* outlived the rock aesthetic as a site of socially extended music making. When Lou Reed, on sleeve notes for *New York* (1989), claimed, “You can’t beat 2 guitars, bass and drums,” he was stating a preference for a set of instrumental choices but also, by implication, adducing a kind of inherent authenticity for it. However, the cracks in this aesthetically aligned, and historically derived, account were already evident. A year earlier, Frith already found “something *essentially* tedious these days about that 4:4 beat and the hoarse (mostly male) cries for freedom” (*Music for Pleasure* 1, emphasis in original).

The likelihood that rock, to extrapolate from Reed’s inclination, was ever inherently anti-hegemonic is questionable at best. In any case, by the end of the

1960s the relationship between commerce and counterculture was already being ironized by advertising campaigns like Elektra's which used the anti-establishment credentials of acts like the Doors to aver that "the man can't steal our music," or which stated "[t]he Revolution is on CBS" (Shuker 6). By the time of punk's upheavals in the 1970s, and long before the release of *New York*, it was already apparent that, as Frith puts it, "far from being 'counter cultural', rock articulated the reconciliation of rebelliousness and capital" (*Music for Pleasure* 2). Certainly that assessment seemed to be validated as the question of what was whose music came to the fore when Metallica, as Garofalo notes, "squandered valuable cultural capital" (477) by joining the legal battle against file-sharing website Napster.

Nevertheless, the combination of appeals to "high art" discourses, and the connotation (if not, in any real sense, denotation) of a sense of being "anti-establishment" that surrounded the vanguard of the rock era were often hugely successful in terms of generating sales. This, in itself, helped to instill into rock's relationship with commerce a dynamic that reinforced the cultural capital of the musicians. Foremost among these were those who had chosen to adopt a group identity, helping to cement that means of peer-driven cultural production as a keystone in the emerging rock tradition. That these groups participated in the generation of economic capital, rather than resisting the overarching system, nevertheless helped to make the group identity implicit in the institutional autonomy that was, in no small way, a consequence of their success. If the figureheads of 1960s counterculture, and punk in the 1970s, did not live out the grandest revolutionary claims that were made for them, this need not negate the changes that they did manage to make. As Martin Cloonan notes, in relation to the archetypal group identified rock band:

[W]hile it is true that the Beatles did engage in the activity of money-making, this in itself did not conflict with their pursuit of artistic freedom. That they did not change the capitalist nature of the business is, in terms of pop, beside the point. The Beatles' commercial success earned them unprecedented artistic freedom... They managed to change the relative power in the relationship between artist and industry. (Cloonan 130–34)

In effect both specific bands and the wider phenomenon of the band became tied up with how authenticity is attributed in popular music in complex and often barely visible ways. The band in and of itself – as well as its output – becomes subject to authentications. These adhere not to a song or album, but to the text of the band. They can override aesthetic considerations for the many listeners to whom it matters whether, say, Keith Moon or Zak Starkey is playing drums for the Who, and are similarly subject to the "moral" dimension of aesthetic judgments described by Frith (*Performing Rites* 72). These "first person plural" authentications have the added effect of helping to endorse other judgments made about acts in a wider sphere.

The band is in some ways a kind of micro-field within the wider field of popular



music, recreating in miniature many of the features of Bourdieu's formulation of social power relations. The various musicians in the group bring their skills and personalities to bear upon vying for creative capital to drive the enterprise forward. It is in a tussle for creative capital within the micro-field—to imprint individual musical priorities on the group effort – that “musical differences” come into play, and intersect with personal concerns. Questions over whose songs to record, aesthetic choices, and overall direction involve delicate negotiations across creative and interpersonal territory. Tension mounts when, for example, a previously reticent member starts writing songs (like George Harrison in the Beatles), musical frustration osmosing into the personal realm. Diminishing contributions and effectiveness – as with Syd Barrett in Pink Floyd – may be a cause for expulsion, forcing the remaining group to choose between their creative, social, and business priorities. Usually there is a mixture of factors, which are hard to disentangle by the time they have reached breaking point.

As a collective agent, the band seeks both cultural and economic capital in the wider of field of production. The evaluations made about the “collective” authenticity of a band refer back to the operations of the micro-field (the interactions between the band members and the musical recordings and performances that emerge from them). But these evaluations also have a bearing on the band's position in the wider field, within which being perceived as authentic is a form of symbolic capital. The internal stability of the band is a factor in the quest for capital – both symbolic and economic. Obviously a smooth-running operation is more likely to succeed than one that is rife with conflict (notwithstanding that a certain amount of tension, depending on the personalities in the group, might be conducive to creative work). If the centrifuge of creative work is turning efficiently, and the personnel are in a relatively harmonious dynamic, then the micro-field of the band acts as a stable agent. Disruptions to this dynamic weaken its capacity to operate effectively and therefore its position in the wider field.

Beyond this fairly straightforward relationship between the band as an agent and the field, however, there is another way in which its group identity pertains to its status in the overarching struggle for capital. The kind of judgments outlined above – the authentications of the band in relation to its projection of itself – feed into the commercial star-making process. Since this is aligned to judgments about authenticity it makes sense that such judgments will produce value in the field. The symbolic capital of being perceived as authentic underpins the idea of the star text in both a general way and in the narrower more specific manner addressed here. The collective “first person plural” authenticity of the band not only provides a referent for specific musical expressions, but also acts as a kind of guarantor for them. Again, the structure of the band, in relation to its commercial milieu, provides a link back to the pre-industrialized musical and social activities of the group.

This applies in both the general and specific senses. Many bands consist of musicians who come to the enterprise having already spent some time working in

a commercial context (Led Zeppelin or the Police, for example). Many others contain musicians who encounter the industry for the first time as a group, having built their market position (and often their musical skills) together. In both cases they tend to be formed by peers, whether in schools or local scenes, a process in no small way driven by the narrative formation myths of rock era pioneers like the Beatles and Stones, whose success and group identities inspired subsequent generations and thus fed back into actual musical practice.

One might even say that “supergroups” are made up of peers, the peer group consisting of internationally acclaimed musicians. Bands form from a pool of available and appropriate musicians. For those at the top of the industrial ladder, that pool will be larger, and include other stars, although subsuming the activity under a group name implies a minimum level of creative co-operation and likemindedness regarding the project. Ultimately, however, the fact that acts like Blind Faith or Them Crooked Vultures attract this epithet also suggests that they are perceived as somehow different from bands whose members achieve fame together. The “day job” of being in a band, a degree of commitment to conjoined careers, is part of what constitutes its identity. Despite the marketing appeal of a supergroup with Dylan, Harrison and Orbison (in the Travelling Wilburys, for instance), the musical identities of its constituent members have been formed separately. Supergroup brands lack the social back-story – the interactions of the micro-field – that characterizes other rock bands.

In building relationships not only with each other in the micro-field but, as a collective agent, with the outside world a band forms a “character.” In learning, socializing, and negotiating creative decisions together, the band members become entwined in an enterprise whose outward face incorporates musical, performative, and image-related features. Logos, performing style, lyrics, musical style, haircuts, clothing, and numerous other details form part of this mix. The myriad ways in which the complex of social and creative activity expresses itself work towards projecting this character. These, alongside innumerable tacit communicative and creative signals, become institutionalized if the band is successful enough to evolve into a brand and the group identity becomes a material and financial fact.

Once this has taken place, new musicians may be slotted in, if they can be seen to “fit” that identity. Within the marketplace and the star system one aspect of the star, alongside talent, is “personality.” When an established joint “personality” has evolved out of historical interactions among a group, it is plausible that, even when individuals within that group change or the nature of its expressions alters, revisions to the original template are evaluated against that template. To follow Jones’s example, then, *Kid A* and “Creep” are both true to the institutionalized character of Radiohead. This helps to explain how wildly different musical gestures can be true to a common referent. This is especially so if one of the characteristics of that referent is a degree of eclecticism, but it also applies to changes in emphasis over the passage of time and not least to whether these are judged to be developments of an original sound or merely a dilution or

bastardization of it.

## Conclusion

The group identity, then, has a bearing on the question of authenticity in rock. The conception of authorship as socially constructed (Toynbee 42–46; McIntyre) exposes the Romantic “myth of authenticity.” But, despite these inconsistencies in the Romantic account, there remains a way in which, in some cases, a version of authenticity can be discerned that neither depends on appeals to Romantic genius nor rejects an understanding of popular music as socially authored. A position that places rock in opposition to capital is inconsistent in the face of evidence about how it is made and scholars have correctly debunked the myths on which this position relies. Nevertheless, by taking Moore’s focus on authentication rather than authenticity and building on it, we can view matters from another angle.

Some of the ways in which rock is produced, the social axes along which it is organized, have been inscribed into it along with the myths, and crystallized into a particular methodology – the band. Ascriptions of “collective authenticity” assess specific bands (and even specific versions of these bands) against this archetypal methodology. In individual cases audiences ascribe authenticity, or a lack of it, by mapping specific incarnations against the original, now institutionalized, character of a band. But there is also a sense in which authenticity refers to a quality extraneous to the band. Not only does the collective “first person plural” methodology provide a “collective authenticity” for the communal (first person singular) agent, but this is also extrapolated out into the field at large.

The idea that authenticity is a myth is linked to a view of it as part of the rock ideology, and the emphasis is often on seeing through that ideology to explain why such myths have arisen. Keightley asserts, for example, that:

Rock emerged because one segment of the popular mainstream was associated with a particular demographic anomaly... Paradoxically, the baby boom’s numbers magnified – rather than “massified” – youth culture. The longstanding sense of youth as marginal and subordinate allowed this newly dominant culture to continue to imagine itself as subcultural.  
(Keightley 139)

But, as well as an ideology, rock is a specific sort of socially extended material practice. Since many believe that it is “the *reconciliation* of rebelliousness and capital” (Frith, *Music for Pleasure 2*, emphasis in original), there has been an emphasis on myth-busting. The problems of seeing authenticity as a platonic form against which acts should be evaluated are well rehearsed. But authenticity in rock can also be understood not as a component of ideology but in relation to a practice. It is a social construct of a particular way of making music. In this light it is not just a myth, although the problems inherent in Romantic aspirations for

the word remain. It is also a reality in terms of being encoded into a practice.

The “collective authenticity,” in this respect, becomes not so much a quality inherent in an individual. Rather, it describes a set of relationships between groups of musicians and fans. Moore’s refraction of authenticity into authentication provides a basis for reassessing the processes at work. To this we can add a “first person plural” locus of authentication that sheds light on both the enduring appeal of the more mythical formulations of the concept and the reasons for their evolution. Beyond this, it also allows us to understand the work of bands, and rock, in relation to a particular strand of popular music history.

Rock can be understood as a set of practices that are subject to authentication in relation to a methodology – one that evolved as part of the formulation of the genre, along with its surrounding ideology. This reveals the relationships between musicians, and between bands and their fans, as rooted in concrete acts, not just adherence to ephemeral values. It is a consequence of the entanglement of socialization and creativity in the group identity of bands. Although the fruits of this process are heavily subject to commercial manipulation, a one-eyed view of this complicity between the rock ideology and commerce increases the risk of throwing the baby out with the bathwater, the “baby” in this case being the “band” mode of creativity. Even as the aesthetic which arose alongside it has been corporatized, this has survived as a means by which musicians enact and refer back to a collective creativity before its encounters with industry. Audiences, in turn, evaluate musicians’ interactions and expressions in relation to these models of collective creativity.

“What’s so funny ‘bout peace, love and understanding?” asked Nick Lowe in the song of that title. “Peace, love and understanding” may have been overused as tropes in the 1960s and 1970s to the point of negating their value as meaningful terms. Certainly, it is much easier to parrot them than to do the hard work of bringing them about. But if we view them as practices rather than abstract ideals and catchphrases, Lowe’s question gains traction. Knee-jerk appeals to Romantic authenticity and a rock ideology that was somehow above commerce served, likewise, to devalue the very concept upon which they depended. Again, however, a “collective” or “first person plural authenticity” with a basis in the actual practices of musicians, historical and latter-day, and the material consequences of these as they become subject to audience authentication, is less of a laughing matter.

## NOTES

1) Even in passing, authenticity is contentious, its use often qualified. Robert Walser for example, places “authenticity” in telltale inverted commas throughout his analysis of heavy metal, acknowledging the underlying controversies.

2) As Frith and Horne have illustrated, colleges and art schools produced many of the key figures of the 1960s rock cohort. Not all of them originated thence, but

it is notable that many did. Members of the Beatles, the Rolling Stones—and, in America, the Doors—all spent time in art-based educational institutions. It is also notable that, even when there was an initial driving force, such “leaders” as Pete Townshend of the Who or Jimmy Page of Led Zeppelin chose the band/group identity model.

3) I have labelled it thus to distinguish it from Fornäs’s “social authenticity.” Although both validations use criteria based on groups or communities, my formulation refers more specifically to the socially modulated creativity of the groups that are being authenticated—the creative/social nexus of the band—rather than the wider community in which this takes place.

4) I refer here to the different incarnations of the band over the course of its lifetime, with Syd Barrett, Roger Waters, and David Gilmour as leaders.

5) This philosophical quandary from Greek legend considered whether a ship repaired piece by piece over time was in fact the same article as the original.

6) The most critically and commercially successful incarnation of the Red Hot Chili Peppers, for instance, included guitarist John Frusicante, a replacement for Hilel Slovak, who died after the release of their third album.

7) This is not to say that bands might not fondly remember early, poorly attended, or technically problematic gigs. But this is more likely to be socially than musically inflected—part of the process of forming and then reinforcing the group identity (cf. Shank 170–71).

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## **Discography**

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